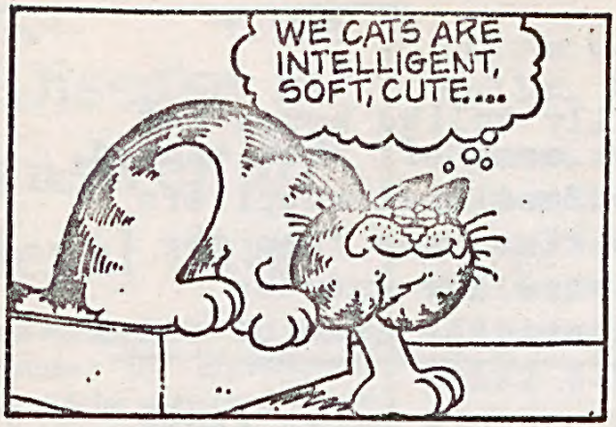

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

NOVEMBER 1979

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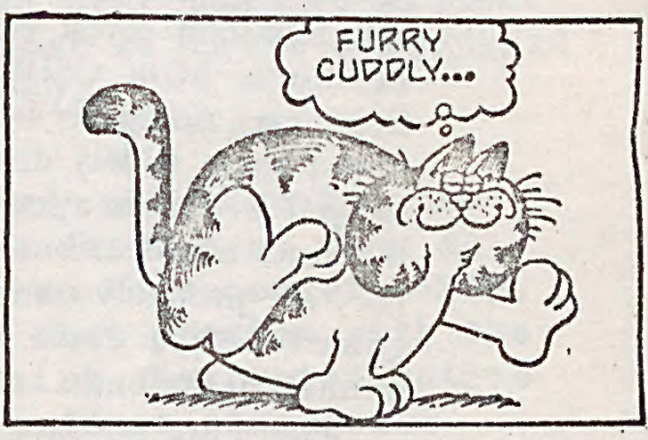
FERAL CATS

This month's theme was prompted by the article supplied by Mr Collins. Thanks too, to other members who supplied material.

MORE ON FERAL CATS by T. Collins.

Last year I supplied our Editor a report on our outback tour which was duly published (Cast. Nat 29). In that we referred to the number of Feral Cats we sighted in far-western N.S.W. and Queensland; and to mention the size of one caught in Northern South Australia. To quote the local radio station it weighed 12.5 kg. (An ordinary house cat is about one third of that.) This sounded far fetched to us at the time but as the radio station seemed sincere we passed the information on to you. Let us quote to you a portion of an article which appeared in the Weekly Times (25-4-79). Apparently a skin buyer had included in his advertisement for fox skins that he was also desiring to buy cat skins. This brought a mild stir among people owning house cats, that their favorite pet would finish up on the back of some lady. Hence the reply published:-



" Mr John Chaldjiam, manager of Allalemdjian & Co. Melb. who have been in the fur business since 1836 and advertising in the Weekly Times for more than 50 years said that house cats were of no interest to the fur trade whatsoever. Feral Cats were descended from domestic cats generations ago, but were now quite different. They came in tabby, tortoiseshell and ginger

from Women's Weekly

colours and the fur was thick and totally unlike house cat fur. Unlike housecats the fur would not come off when tanned. The advertisement had been aimed at professional suppliers of fox skins and 95% of all feral catsskins came from the western slopes of New South Wales, between Hay and the Queensland border. A good skin up to about the size of a fox could bring $11 !!"

So you see that if Mr Chaldjiam quotes a "skin up to about the size of a fox" then those feral cats out there are sure big enough to weigh 12.5 kilogram. An what damage must they do to our native wildlife. They seem to be everywhere in the bush. We saw one fair sized very fat specimen in the bush in the Snowy Mountains. It was last May at approx 5 000 ft (1 500 m) with four to six inches (10 - 15 cm) of snow on the ground, and the way he sped off he must have been there for years.

CAT (from Frith - "Wildlife Conservation"

The domestic cat is widespread in the bush. My own most remote records include the Gibson Desert, the Arnhem Land escarpment, and monsoon forest edge near the Jardine River on Cape York Peninsula. Most CSIRO wildlife research parties encounter free-living cats, no matter where their operation is based. One such party found them widely distributed in the Kimberley Region and destroyed seventy in a few weeks around their camps. I have no doubt that cats are distributed throughout the whole country, although they are probably commonest around towns where kindly but misguided people evade their responsibilities by loosing unwanted animals in the bush.

There are no data on the effect of these efficient predators on small native fauna. It is usually assumed to be severe.

From Marshall - "The Great Extermination

And of St. Francis Island Rat-kangaroo: 'When the island was first settled some forty years ago', wrote Wood Jones in 1924, '"Rat-kangaroos" or "Tungoos" were swarming. The animals do not seem to have formed burrows, but they lived in the undergrowth, and used to hop frequently into the homestead to take bread or other eatables thrown to them from the table. They do not appear to have been nocturnal; they do not seem even to have been afraid of the human invaders of the island. Their only offence seems to have been that they had a liking for the garden produce of the family who settled on the island.

'Cats were introduced in order to exterminate the Tungoos, and their work has been done completely.'

Almost unbelievably, we are not even sure what is the *species* to which this marsupial belonged!

Age 15/10/79

'Disease is answer to feral cats'

SWAN HILL. — A disease similar to myxomatosis should be developed to kill feral cats according to Geelong conservationist Mr. Trevor Pescott.

Mr. Pescott, president of the Geelong Environment Council, told the 14th annual meeting of the Australian Local Government Women's Association in Swan Hill on Saturday the disease was needed to protect fauna.

If councils brought in controls, domestic cats would not be affected, he said.

Mr. Pescott said that "such a fuss had been made about rabbits and myxomatosis" that he doubted if the public would accept the scheme.

The destruction of wild life by feral cats was one of the most disturbing features of conservation, not only in Victoria but all over Australia, he said.

A suggestion by Mrs. Beryl Andrews of Healesville that special licences be issued to hunters to shoot feral cats drew applause from the 90 people at the conference.

Mr. Pescott, author of a number of books about the Victorian countryside and a past councillor of the Victorian National Parks Association, also suggested that roadsides cleared for fire breaks be planted with native trees and bushes to encourage wildlife to them.

Extracts from "They All Ran Wild", by Eric Rolls, Angus and Robertson, 1969.

Thomas Margarey of Enfield, South Australia, had said in 1971 that "no more native cats should be killed for they are good rabbit killers. Domestic cats are useless. They are destructive to poultry and quail, which bird it will almost if not entirely annihilate.....

....thousands(of cats, in 1880) were released... the cats turned out for rabbit eating were not simply shaken from a bag near the burrow and left. Portable pens were erected in the bush and the cats were fed there until they had kittens. The pen was then opened and feeding gradually reduced so that they could accustom themselves to bush life....

....cats are notoriously indifferent to food in quantity. When there are many rabbits, cats seem to share their burrows amicably....

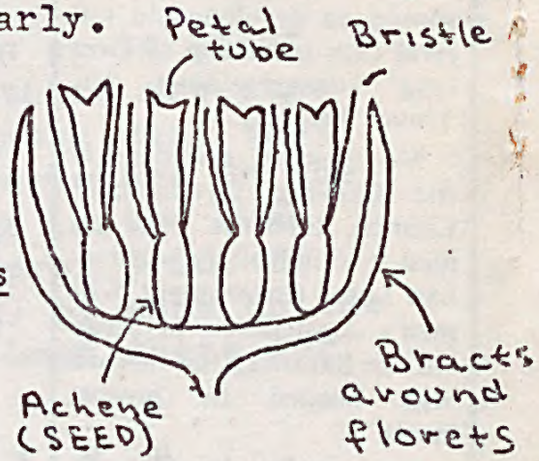
... they (cats) live on birds, lizards, mice and and exquisite little marsupials that people "who can't bear to kill dear pussy's kittens" have never heard of. Most of these marsupials are rare and seldom seen.

Actually, feral cats may not threaten the creatures they prey on as much as they do the small native hunters they compete with. Its a basic principle that species with the same needs cannot coexist. Marsupial native cats are now rare or extinct throughout large parts of their former range. Zoologists don't know why this has happened, but it's possible that feral cats are involved. Incidently, in the 1880's many farmers went to great trouble to accustom cats to living in the bush, hoping they would control rabbits. Yet at the same time native cats, which also eat rabbits, were declared vermin and killed for bounties.

(From Ecos 13, Aug 1977)

DIMINUTIVE DAISIES OF KALIMNA PARK

Most of those who walk through the bush and admire the wildflowers overlook the tiny daisies. They are quite common and attractive, and areworth looking at closely.
The daisies discussed here are quite tiny, growing to no more than 5 cm, and are usually about half this height or less. A magnifying glass is really needed to see them clearly.



To be certain that it is a daisy, you need to have a close look at the flower. All daisies have a "compound flower". That is, the apparent flower is made up of a number of tiny flowers, called florets The florets are surrounded by bracts. Usually the bracts are green, and look rather like the usual sepals. Sometimes the bracts are in one row, or there may be several rows. The bracts may also be yellow or white or like tissue paper. Sometimes they look like petals.
At the bottom of the floret is the developing seed, called the achene. They may be smooth, hairy, warty, have spines etc.

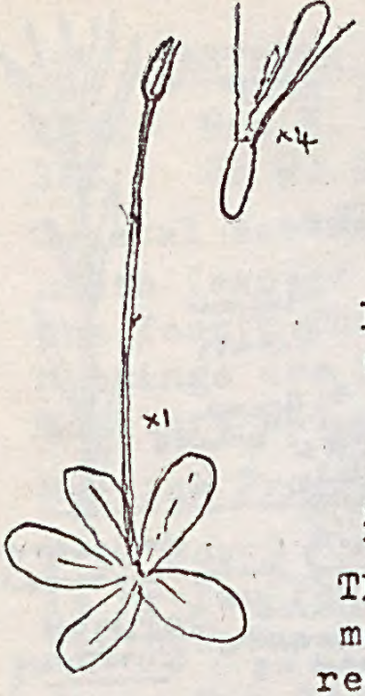
The petals are usually tube-shaped, but they may be strap shaped (as is the case in many garden specimens) or absent.

The bristles may be thread-like, or feathery, or absent, or in the form of flat scales.

In some daisies, the flower heads are crowded together; these are, in effect, compound compound flowers!

KEY TO THE DIMINUTIVE DAISIES IN KALIMNA

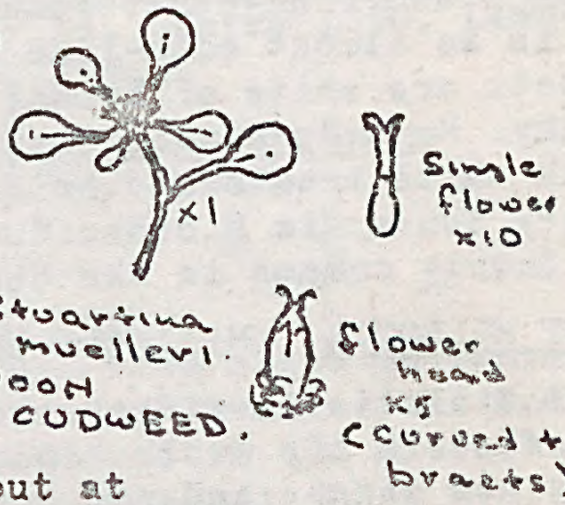
1	Leaves always a rosette at the base (scattered)	Smooth Cat's ear
1a	Leaves not forming a rosette	2
2	Leaves spoonshaped. (very common)	Spoon Cudweed
2a	Some leaves toothed (very common)	Rayless Daisy
2b	Leaves narrow, not toothed	3
3	Bristles scale-like, white (very common)	Small Wrinklewort
3b	Bristles feathery; flowers yellowish, at the ends of the stems (localised)	Common Sunray
3c	Bristles thin filaments, not feathery	
	-flowers solitary at end of stalk (common)	Soft Millotia
	-flowers crowded, very hairy (scattered)	Tiny Cudweed)
3d	Bristles absent (rare)	Common Bow-flower



SMOOTH CAT'S EAR (Hypochoeris glabra)

Introduced. This is a smaller version of the widespread lawn weed. All of the florets are strap-shaped. Bracts are green and the plant is almost hairless.
In good conditions the height will be almost double that shown.
It is scattered in Kalimna, particularly east of the tourist road.

SPOON CUDWEED (Stuartina muelleri)

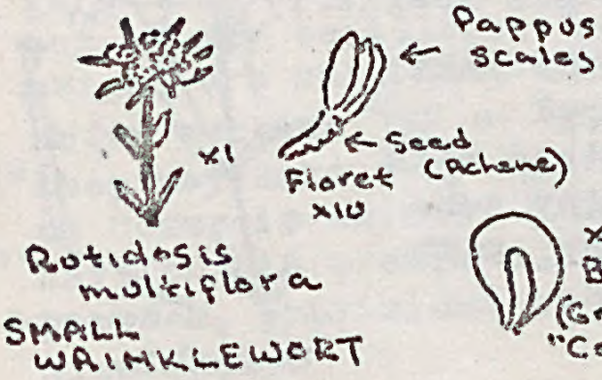


The spoon-shaped leaves make this easy to recognise. The top leaf surfaces are green, but the mass of white hairs under the leaves and around the flowers give an overall silver-white appearance. Bristles are absent. There are several layers of bracts. The inner two are longer and spread out at the tip, giving the appearance of a pair of petals. In good conditions it branches at the base. Widespread.

RAYLESS DAISY (Brachycome perpusilla)

The toothed leaves and hooked edges of the seeds makes Rayless Daisy easy to recognise. The bracts are green and thick, giving an almost square cross section to the flower heads. The plant is hairless. Size and amount of branching depends on the conditions. Rayless Daisy is very common throughout Kalimna.

SMALL WRINKLEWORT (Rutidosis multiflora)

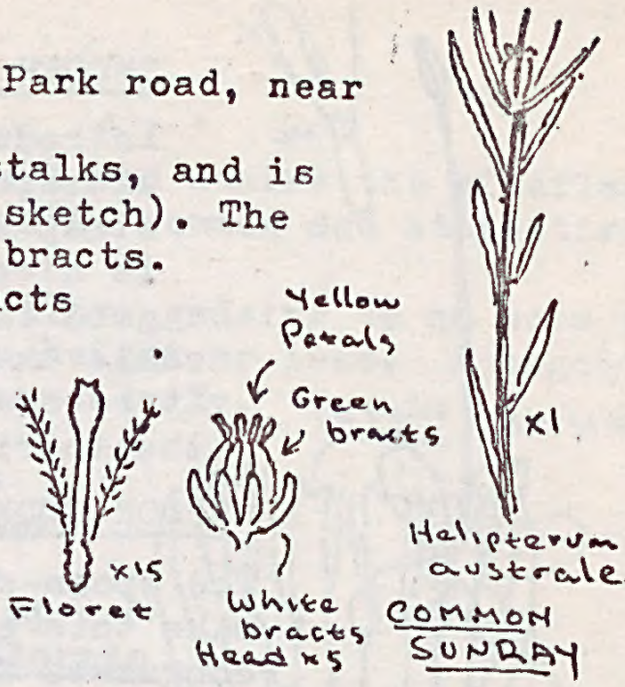


This is the commonest daisy, and hundreds of plants massed together to give a carpet is common. There may be one or several flower heads. The scales at the base of the petals look like white petals. The bracts have green centre with tracing-paper like wings.

COMMON SUNRAY (Helipterum australe)

It is very common east of the Kalimna Park road, near the water tank.

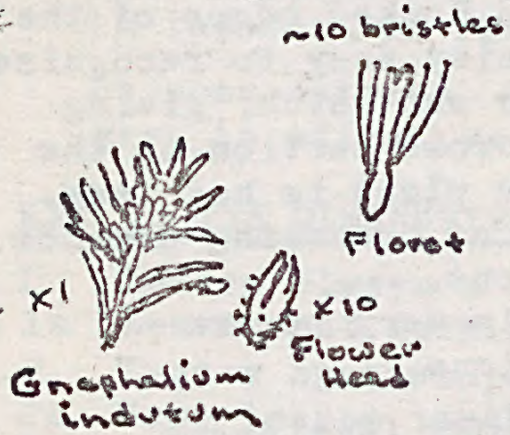
The flower head is at the end of the stalks, and is surrounded by leaves (as shown in the sketch). The petals are yellow and extend past the bracts. Common Sunray can be branched. The bracts are hairy; there may be some hairs on the leaves and stems.



(Another Helipterum, the Pygmy Sunray is recorded for Kalimna; it is not common and I have not found it here. It is an almost moss-like plant; bracts are white or brown; seeds are silky. Moss Sunray is similar but with white bracts and hairless seeds. Hoary Sunray is a conspicuous plant that is fairly common in the district)

SOFT MILLOTIA (Millotia tenuifolia)

Soft millotia is widespread and commom. The flowers are at the ends of the stalks; they are single and not surrounded by leaves. The bracts are green and the flower petals are hidden by the bristles. Most parts are hairy.



TINY CUDWEED (Gnaphalium indutum)

The flower heads are crowded together between the leaves. The leaves and flower heads are densly hairy giving the plant a silvery white appearance. Often the tips of the bracts are reddish. It is less common than the daisies above but can be locally abundant.

COMMON BOW FLOWER (Toxanthes muelleri)

I have not seen Common Bow Flower in Kalimna; it has however been recorded by several observers. Most of the plant is clothed with short glandular hairs (rather like tiny sundew hairs.) The achenes are quite long, with a tiny flower; it is without bristles.

CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

PRES: Mrs R. Mills — TREAS: Mr L. Bransgrove
SEC: Mr G. Sitch — NEWS LETTER ED: Mr E. Perkins

General meetings are held on the second Friday of each month (except January). Business meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month (except December) Meetings are held at 8.00 p.m. at the Education Centre. Visitors and prospective members are invited to attend.

Meeting Program

Frid Nov 9 Mammals Speaker is Mr Ian Fenslau, Bendigo Field Naturalist's Club.

Thurs Nov 22 Business meeting

Frid Dec 14 Birds Bird Observers Slide Set. Leader is Mr M. Winterbottom

Thurs Jan 24 Business meeting

Frid Feb 8 Annual meeting

Frid Mar 21 Photoflora 80

Slide entries close Feb 6
Admission: Adults $1.50, Cildren 50c, Family $3.00
Advertising leaflets have been ordered. Screening will be in the Library Hall.

Excursions

Sat Nov 10 Werona/Shepherds Flat. Leave Ed. Centre 1.30. Leader is G. Sitch.

Sat Dec 15 Bells Swamp
Leave Ed. Centre at 1.30

KOALA PARK

We have been asked to provide representatives for the Koala Park Committee. G. Sitch has been nominated; other members interested are asked to contact Mr Sitch.

BALANCE SHEET

Printing	$7.50
Photoflora tickets	$5.00
Meeting expenses	$5
Balance	$36.47

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE CAT NUISANCE

Many gardeners who plant natives to attract birds find that bird-eating cats are also attracted. Most gardeners have developed their own remedies, but it may be illegal to interfere with a neighbour's cat. City Councils could help; under section 197 of the Local Govt. Act they may make a by-law to limit the number of domestic animals a householder may have on his premises. If you have a cat problem, provisions of the Health Act may also apply.

Reference: Bird Observer May 1979

OBSERVATIONS TO MAKE IN NOVEMBER by G. Broadway

1. See how many lilies are flowering.
2. Which birds in the Castlemaine District build the following types of nest:-
   (a) A shallow depression in the ground.
   (b) A crude platform of twigs on the branch of a tree
   (c) A well constructed nest in a tree, camouflaged or decorated
   (d) A tunnel
   (e) A carefully woven nest
   (f) A plastered nest
   (g) A conspicuous nest in an open tree or on a telephone pole
   (h) No nest.
3. Have any birds been seen feeding young cuckoos?
4. Any sightings of
   (a) A mistletoe bird
   (b) A white fronted chat
5. Watch for the following insects (among others)
   (a) Caterpillars, various
   (b) Wasps, nest building
   (c) Long Horned Grasshopper
   (d) Saw fly
6. Any sightings of cats in the local bush?
7. Any other sightings of things which may be of interest to other members of the club.

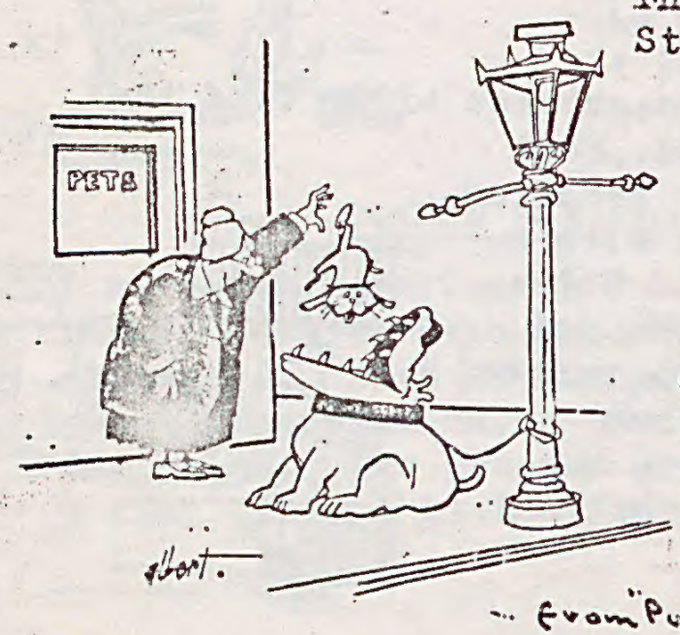
DIET OF A FERAL CAT

The stomach of a cat taken at Yanrey Station in Western Australia contained

3 Geckoes 2 Dragons
2 Large Centipedes
1 Stick Insect
2 Blind Worms
3 Grasshoppers
1 Spinifex Hopping Mouse

This indicates that cats have a diverse diet, and the sort of effect they have on native mammals.

(From Bird Observer, June 1977)



-- From "Punch"